

DOMINICA 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom of thought, freedom to practice one's religion, and freedom from taking oaths contrary to one's beliefs.

During the year, members of the government's COVID-19 task force continued to meet with religious leaders to address vaccine hesitancy. Rastafarians continued to press the government to fully legalize marijuana use for religious purposes. The Dominica Association of Evangelical Churches (DAEC) reported it continued to oppose homosexuality and to support the government's ban on same-sex marriages. The Dominican Christian Council, with the participation of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Methodist Churches, continued its opposition to a constitutional challenge seeking to overturn the country's law related to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) conduct, which the Minority Rights Dominica (MiRiDom) and the HIV Legal Network filed on behalf of an unnamed claimant. The challenge remained in court at year's end.

Interdenominational organizations continued their efforts to advance respect for religious freedom and diversity. Interdenominational dialogue between Catholic and Protestant communities continued on a regular basis.

The U.S. embassy continued its engagement on religious freedom issues. Embassy officials met during the year with the Ministry of Governance, Public Service Reform, Citizen Empowerment, and Social Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs. Embassy officials met with evangelical Protestant and Catholic leaders to discuss the state of religious freedom and human rights in the country, including their views on same-sex unions.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 74,600 (midyear 2022). According to the U.S. government, Catholics represent 61.4 percent of the population, Protestants 28.6 percent, Rastafarians 1.3 percent, Jehovah's Witnesses 1.2 percent, and those listing "other" 0.3 percent; 6.1 percent report no religious affiliation, and 1.1 percent are unspecified. According to the most recent national census in 2011, approximately 53 percent of the population are Catholic. Evangelical Protestants constitute approximately 20 percent of the population. The largest evangelical Protestant groups are Pentecostals, with 6 percent, Baptists, with 5 percent, and the Christian Union Mission, with 4 percent. Seventh-day Adventists constitute 7 percent of the population. Other smaller religious groups include Anglicans, Methodists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Rastafarians, and Baha'is. According to the census, 9 percent of the population professes no religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom of thought, freedom to practice one's religion, and freedom from taking oaths contrary to one's beliefs. By law, the government may make reasonable exceptions to constitutionally required provisions in the interests of defense, public safety, public order, public morality, and public health. The law criminalizes same sex relationships; punishments include prison terms of up to 12 years, and courts may also order offenders sent to psychiatric institutions.

The constitution prohibits a minister of a religion from being qualified to run in an election.

Religious groups seeking nonprofit status must register with the Attorney General's Office. They must submit a letter signed by five executives of the religious group and provide the official name of the group and an address identifying the place of worship. The registration fee is 25 Eastern Caribbean

dollars (\$9). The Attorney General's Registry Office reviews and approves applications. Any organization denied permission to register has the right to apply for judicial review. By law, religious groups also must register buildings used to publish marriage banns (announcements of marriage) or used as places of worship.

The constitution grants religious groups the right to establish and maintain private schools and to provide religious instruction. Students of different religions may attend private schools run by religious groups of another affiliation. Public schools may hold nondenominational prayers, and attendance is optional. The law requires the vaccination (non-COVID-19) of all children to attend both public and private schools. The government does not offer a waiver for children without vaccinations. Parents may homeschool their children.

Dreadlocks are prohibited in all government-funded schools as well as in prisons; however, the law is not enforced.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

During the year, members of the government's COVID-19 task force continued to meet with religious leaders to address vaccine hesitancy.

The DAEC continued to advocate the repeal of a law prohibiting licensed clergy from running for public office.

Rastafarians continued to press the government for complete legalization of marijuana use for religious purposes following the decriminalization of possession of less than one ounce of marijuana in 2020; unlimited use and cultivation remained illegal. Representatives of the Rastafarian community, however, again said authorities did not enforce the law against using marijuana when the

community used it in its religious rites. In July, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit announced his support for allowing a domestic medical marijuana industry.

The government continued to subsidize teacher salaries at all private schools run by religious organizations, including those affiliated with the Catholic, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist Churches.

At public schools, teachers, principals, and students continued to lead nondenominational prayers during morning assemblies, but students were not required to participate.

The DAEC reported it continued to stand firmly against homosexuality and to support the law banning same sex marriage. In 2020, the Dominica Christian Council, with the participation of Anglican, Methodist, and Catholic Churches, applied for, and received, the High Court's permission to intervene in opposition to a 2019 constitutional challenge seeking to overturn parts of the law. The MiRiDom and the HIV Legal Network filed the challenge on behalf of an unnamed claimant. On September 28, the High Court began case hearings that continued through year's end.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Religious groups continued to produce live and recorded televised religious services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, which lasted through the first half of the year, providing broadcasts on radio, television, and social media. The DAEC and other religious groups continued to operate counseling hotlines for persons experiencing fear, worry, or emotional stress because of COVID-19.

During the year, the Catholic Church-associated Caritas Dominica Youth Emergency Action Committee's (YEAC) continued to train individuals regardless of their religious background as first responders in cases of natural or human-caused disasters. YEAC used the opportunity to demonstrate and promote religious tolerance. Interdenominational organizations continued their efforts to advance

respect for religious freedom and diversity through dialogue between the DAEC and the Christian Council.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials met with the Ministry of Governance, Public Service Reform, Citizen Empowerment, and Social Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs to underscore the need to respect all religious groups and protect religious freedom as a fundamental right.

In February, an embassy official met with DAEC President Randy Rodney and Catholic Bishop Gabriel Malzaire to discuss religious freedom in the country, their positions on LGBTQI+ issues, and constitutional provisions prohibiting a minister of religion from running in an election.

Embassy officials and staff maintained social media engagement on religious freedom, including extending greetings on religious holidays and calling for respect for religious freedom.